

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES

3 3433 08234037 7

CEREMONY OF DEDICATION



Ebenezer Knight Dexter Statue

1894



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



Henry C. Clark.

(Handwritten)

REPORT OF THE EXERCISES

AT THE

Dedication of the Statue

OF

EBENEZER KNIGHT DEXTER

PRESENTED TO THE

CITY OF PROVIDENCE

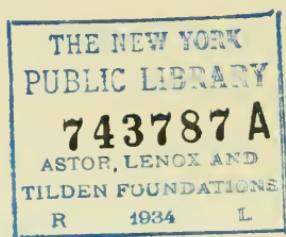
BY

HENRY C. CLARK, Esq.

JUNE 29, 1894.

The Providence Press:
SNOW & FARNHAM, CITY PRINTERS
15 Custom House Street.
1894.

JL



RESOLUTION TO PRINT 500 COPIES OF THE REPORT OF THE
DEDICATORY EXERCISES OF THE STATUE OF
EBENEZER KNIGHT DEXTER.

[Approved December 4, 1894.]

RESOLVED, That the joint special committee appointed by resolution No. 401, series of 1893, and Nos. 21 and 384, series of 1894, be and said committee is hereby authorized and directed to have printed for the use of the City Council five hundred copies of the report of the dedicatory exercises of the statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter on June 29, 1894, the expense thereof to be charged to the appropriation for printing.

REPORT.

On June 13th, 1893, Henry C. Clark, Esq., presented to the Board of Aldermen the following communication, viz.:

PROVIDENCE, R. I., June 13, 1893.

TO THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF
PROVIDENCE:

GENTLEMEN: If you will expend Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000 00) in improving the "Dexter Training Field," I will give, to be placed upon the ground, a bronze statue of Columbus to be cast by the Gorham M'f'g Co.

Accepting the offer will tend to beautify the city, honor the discoverer of America, the memory of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, encourage home talent, and recognize those who have given our city a world-wide notice by the manufacture of their wares.

Yours respectfully,

H. C. CLARK.

This communication was referred on the same day to a joint special committee, consisting of Aldermen Myron H. Fuller, Henry B. Winship and Charles E. Harris, and Councilmen George L.

Vose, Wm. P. Vaughan and Augustine Giblin, with instructions "to confer with the Commissioners of the Dexter Donation relative thereto and to report thereon."

This committee immediately organized by the selection of Alderman Myron H. Fuller as chairman, and D. F. Hayden as secretary. After holding a conference with Mr. Clark, that gentleman submitted the following proposition to the committee, viz.:

PROVIDENCE, July 6, 1893.

To MYRON H. FULLER, ESQ., *Chairman of the Joint Special Committee of the City Council:*

I desire through you to state to your committee and to the City Council that I have decided since my communication of June 13, 1893, offering to place a statue of Columbus on Dexter Training Field that it would be more appropriate to have a statue of the "benefactor and friend of the unfortunate," Ebenezer Knight Dexter, placed upon the Training Field that he gave to the city. In recognition therefore of Mr. Dexter's memory I hereby agree to place a bronze statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, to be cast by the Gorham M'f'g Company, on Dexter Training Field, instead of a statue of Columbus, provided the city will furnish a suitable pedestal for said statue, and also expend the sum of \$3,000 for the improvement of said Training Field.

H. C. CLARK.

Upon the receipt of this generous proposal the committee reported on July 20, 1893, to the City Council as follows, viz.:

REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE RELATIVE TO THE GIFT
OF H. C. CLARK TO DEXTER TRAINING FIELD.

TO THE HONORABLE THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
PROVIDENCE:

The joint special committee appointed by resolution No. 401, current series, upon the communication of Henry C. Clark relative to the gift of a statue of Columbus to be placed on Dexter Training Field, and "to confer with the commissioners of the Dexter Donation relative thereto and to report thereon," respectfully report :

That they have considered the matter and have conferred with the commissioners of the Dexter Donation and with Mr. Henry C. Clark, whose generous proposition has evoked universal commendation from our citizens. At a meeting of your committee, held on July 5th, 1893, Mr. Clark expressed a desire to substitute a statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, the "benefactor and friend of the unfortunate" for that of Columbus, a suggestion that elicited the hearty approval of your committee—for if any statue is to be placed upon Dexter Training Field it should be one of the great philanthropist who, not only gave this tract of land to the city, but who, also, as a token of his strong attachment to his native town, and

out of an ardent desire to "ameliorate the condition of the poor" bequeathed to the city a munificent gift of lands and an asylum that bears his name.

Having conferred with the commissioners of the Dexter Donation, your committee consulted with the city solicitor as to whether the erection of a statue as proposed would violate the provisions of the will of the donor as to the use of said Training Field; and having been assured by the law officer of the city that the placing of a statue upon Dexter Training Field would be regarded in the light of an adornment and in no sense diverting the use of the same as a training field, and being also assured that this view will be cordially accepted by a large number of our citizens who have expressed a desire that Mr. Clark's proposition should be accepted by the city, your committee recommend the acceptance of the proposed gift of Mr. Henry C. Clark by the City Council, and that suitable provision be made for the reception, location and unveiling of said statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter. They therefore submit the accompanying resolutions and recommend the passage of the same.

Respectfully submitted, for the committee,

MYRON H. FULLER,

Chairman.

Subsequently the City Council directed the Park Commissioners to expend the sum of \$3,000 in concreting the walks and grading Dexter Training Field, and on April 6, 1894, the City Council,

having obtained authority from the General Assembly, instructed the Park Commissioners to contract for the construction of a suitable foundation, base and pedestal for the proposed statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, and also for curbing around said statue.

On June 25, 1894, the Committee having the matter in charge was authorized to make arrangements for the reception and dedication of the statue and to arrange for suitable exercises on the occasion of the unveiling of said statue and its formal presentation to the city.

On the same day a resolution was passed by the City Council as follows, viz.:

RESOLVED, That His Honor the Mayor be and he is hereby requested to accept and also to take the care and custody of the statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, to be presented to the City by Henry C. Clark, Esq., on June 29th, 1894, on behalf of the City of Providence.

In the meantime the work of preparing Dexter Training Field had been in progress; the foundation, base and pedestal for the statue had been constructed and the figure had been placed in position. In the supervision of this important work the Committee desire to acknowledge the valuable assistance rendered by Mr. R. H. Deming,

chairman of the Park Commissioners, by the representatives of the Gorham Mfg. Co., and by the donor of the statue, Mr. Clark.

The day assigned for the unveiling of the statue June 29th, dawned auspiciously, but clouded up and was somewhat showery in the afternoon, though not sufficient to interfere with the programme. At 2 o'clock, Chairman Fuller and Messrs. Winship, Harris, Vose, Vaughan, Giblin and Secretary Hayden, of the Committee of Arrangements, met in the reception room of the City Hall, to receive the invited guests, prominent among whom were His Excellency Gov. D. Russell Brown, Secretary of State Charles P. Bennett, Col. Daniel R. Ballou, Acting Mayor; Hon. A. C. Barstow, Hon. Jabez C. Knight, Hon. Charles Sidney Smith, Hon. Wm. S. Hayward, Hon. H. R. Barker, B. B. Knight, Esq., R. H. Deming, Esq., Hon. Thomas Durfee, the orator of the day, Rev. Edward Holyoke, Henry C. Clark, Esq., State and city officers, members of the commission on the Dexter Donation, members of the City Council and a number of citizens. A procession was subsequently formed in front of the City Hall, the United Train of Artillery, Col. Cyrus M. Van Slyck commanding, with Reeves' American Band, acting as escort. The route of march was through

Dorrance, Westminster and Dexter streets to the centre of Dexter Training Field, where the statue was located, concealed beneath the folds of an American flag.

The statue is a handsome bronze figure eight feet in height, and stands upon a magnificent granite pedestal nine feet high, designed by Mr. R. H. Deming of the Park Commission. Mr. Dexter is represented in continental costume; in his left hand is a walking stick and in his right a partially opened scroll of parchment. The inscriptions on the pedestal are as follows:

PRESENTED TO THE
CITIZENS OF PROVIDENCE, BY
HENRY C. CLARK, ESQ.,
IN HONOR OF
EBENEZER KNIGHT DEXTER,
WHO GAVE HIS PROPERTY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC AND THE HOMELESS.

1893.

The other inscription is: "Leaving nothing but a headstone to mark our passage through life does not make the world better. They live best who serve humanity the most."

The cost of the statue was nearly \$5,000, and it has been pronounced an admirable and accurate portraiture of the great philanthropist.

When the procession arrived at Dexter Training Field it was found that a large concourse of people had assembled to do honor to the memory of Mr. Dexter, while some six hundred pupils from the Bridgham and Messer Street Grammar Schools, in charge of Musical Director E. P. Russell, had also taken their station near the large stand reserved for the speakers, State and city officers and invited guests. The United Train of Artillery having escorted the procession to the grand stand, immediately formed as a guard of honor, surrounding the statue.

Alderman Fuller, chairman of the committee of arrangements, acted as master of ceremonies, and the exercises were then opened with the "Jubel" overture by Reeves' American Band.

Rev. Edward Holyoke offered prayer, and then the school children sang "God of Our Fathers," accompanied by the Band.

Chairman Fuller then introduced Mr. Henry C. Clark, the donor of the statue, who spoke as follows:

PRESENTATION ADDRESS OF HENRY C. CLARK, ESQ.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AND LAST,
BUT NOT LEAST, THE CHILDREN:

In presenting the statue of Mr. Dexter to the citizens of Providence it is befitting to give a brief sketch of his life.

As he has no contemporary living to perform the service, we shall have recourse to history.

"Ebenezer Knight Dexter, son of Knight and Phebe (Harris) Dexter, was born in Providence, April 26, 1773. Early in life he engaged in mercantile pursuits, and pursued his business with such industry and careful attention that, in a few years, he accumulated a handsome fortune. He was Marshal of the District of Rhode Island for several years before his death. 'He held the office,' says Judge Staples, 'in most inauspicious times for himself. During the embargo, non-intercourse and war, his duties were arduous, and sometimes directly contravening the wishes and the interests of a large portion of the community. Yet he so carefully and skillfully managed that he lost not the esteem and respect of his fellow-towns-men, nor the confidence of the government.'

"The condition of the poor of his native town seems to have awakened his deepest sympathy, and induced him to make generous provisions for their wants. It was found that by his will he had committed in trust to the town of Providence what must ever be regarded as a princely donation."

"The Rhode Island American, of the date of Aug. 20, 1824, a few days after the death of Mr. Dexter, which occurred Aug. 10, says: 'The forty-acre farm in Providence Neck, a part of this liberal bequest, is given on the condition that the town shall erect thereon, within five years, an almshouse, which is to be enclosed with an extensive and permanent wall, within twenty years, and we hope ere long to see a Dexter Asylum rearing its walls in these pleasant and productive fields.'

"The freemen, in town meeting, November 22, 1824, voted to accept the gift thus generously bestowed, on the conditions upon which it was made by the donor, and directed that the property, to be forever known as the 'Dexter Donation,' should be kept distinct from the other property and funds of the town, by the town treasurer. In 1826 a building committee was appointed to superintend the erection of the Dexter Asylum, which cost somewhat over \$43,000, and was completed in 1830. It was in all respects a first-class structure, and admirably adapted to the uses for which it was designed. The stone wall, built around the forty-acre lot, which, according to the directions of the will, was to be three feet at the surface of the ground and eight feet high, was finished in 1840. It is 6,220 feet in length, and, as originally built, contained 7,840 cords of stone, and cost about \$22,000. Some changes and improvements on the building have been made within a few years, which have added greatly to its convenience and its architectural beauty.

"The Asylum began to be occupied in the latter part of the summer of 1828, under the superintendence of Mr.

Gideon Palmer, the number of paupers received into it at first being sixty-four, including five children. The Dexter Asylum is an institution, of which, with its beautiful surroundings, the citizens of Providence are justly proud. The far-seeing sagacity and benevolence of its donor have secured for the poor of the city a comfortable home for all time to come, not surpassed by the almshouse of any other city in the country."

Leaving nothing but a headstone to mark our passage through life does not make the world better. He lived to make the world better by his living. He gave the accumulations of his life to the noblest virtue, charity. The many who are gone, the living and the innumerable who are to come, will owe him monuments in blessings for sheltering them in the days of their adversity. He illustrated that a man can be a Christian in practice, without being stuffed with dogmas. The text, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," can be justly placed to his memory. Following his example will benefit humanity, give honor to the followers and their posterity.

"Tis not the whole of life to live "

"One crowded hour of joyful life is more than an age without a name."

Now, Mr. Mayor, we trust in passing the statue into the care of our city fathers that they will continue to beautify these grounds in the honor of the dead philanthropist, always remembering that a "thing of beauty is not only a joy forever," but an educator.

With Mr. Clark's concluding words the flags enclosing the statue were gracefully wafted aside and

Mr. Clark's gift—a Gorham masterpiece of art—was exposed to public view. There was an immediate outburst of enthusiastic admiration and applause, augmented by the inspiring strains of the Band which was meanwhile playing the "Star Spangled Banner." When the approbation of the assemblage had subsided, the Chairman introduced Acting Mayor Daniel R. Ballou, who received the gift on behalf of the City of Providence, and who spoke as follows:

ACTING MAYOR BALLOU'S ADDRESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

In the swirling, swiftly flowing current of our complex civilization, men are inclined to neglect, if not to disregard the lessons which have been drawn from the experiences of human kind. It is profitable, therefore, to pause now and then, amid the engrossing activities of a busy life, and take a retrospective view of past events, that our minds may be so enlightened thereby that our future action shall be guided by wisdom and prudence.

It stands undisputed that whatever of wisdom mankind has acquired has been drawn from the vast fields of human experience, which stretch back through the unnumbered centuries of man's strange, eventful history.

Man was created and thereupon invested with all the functions of a sentient, reasoning being, and laws were



ASBESTOS
CEMENT
TILE AND
FOUNDATIONS

L

at the same time laid down for his guidance, but wisdom was given to him only after he had eaten the bitter fruits of experience.

In the great fields of human action mankind have rarely been guided by wisdom, and even now, after all these centuries of human trial, wisdom does not fill the earth with its presence.

As the scanty store of the precious metals has been wrung from the reluctant earth by exhausting toil, privation and suffering, so has the meagre store of human wisdom been garnered in the vast fields of man's experience through the slow and painful processes of human struggle, of failure, and of success.

Man in the higher civilization of the age, has learned, and only under the severe discipline of experience, that the wise man is he who liveth an upright and unselfish life. Man dies and passes away, and if he has lived a pure and useful life and if his deeds have been good his memory will be cherished and honored among men, and his name will be associated for all time with the virtues which his life work exemplified.

When we invoke the memory of George Washington it is only to recall his exalted manhood, his commanding virtues, and his illustrious services in the great cause of American Independence, and when the sad, care-worn face of the revered Lincoln rises before our minds, it is only to lose sight of the man in the memory of his untiring devotion, his sublime faithfulness and his grandly broad humanity, nobly displayed in the mighty task of guiding our common country through its awful perils.

We speak of Washington Irving, but the personality of the man is lost amid the glories of his resplendent genius in the great world of letters; so of Franklin, as we bend low before the altar of his great wisdom; and so of Peabody and Childs, in the warm glow of the humane charities which glorified their successful life works.

The future generations of our city's augmenting population will come and go. Some of their thronging numbers as they pass this spot will pause to look at this quaint figure, clad in the antique garments of an earlier civilization. Few will recognize it as that of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, but all will recognize it as that of the author of a noble charity, which is more an imperishable monument to his memory than statues of marble or bronze.

Turning to Mr. Clark, the speaker said :

"It was a happy thought, sir, that led you to generously bestow upon our beautiful city, the scene of the struggles and successes of your own busy and honorable life work, this creation of art in honor of the memory of one who, living, made princely provision, and for all time, for the unfortunate poor of his native town.

Our streets and public places are adorned by few works of art, but what we have are rich in historic value.

In the little park in beautiful Elmwood, stands a spirited statue of the great Discoverer who opened the gates of a New World, through which was borne the germ that took deep root in our New England soil, and which has grown and expanded into a mighty empire. In the midst

of the sylvan beauty of our picturesque Roger Williams Park stands an ideal figure of the great apostle of civil and religious liberty, who, by a lively experiment, demonstrated to the world the successful application of these benign principles in human government. His grateful countrymen proudly point to this feature in our matchless system as the crowning glory of our American civilization.

Down in the great centre of business traffic, where the current of human activities runs swift and strong, stands an imposing monument erected by a grateful people to the memory of the Union soldiers, slain in battle, and opposite this the equestrian statue of Rhode Island's great soldier hero. These represent the patriotism and the valor of the brave sons of our gallant State who shared the perils and the glories of preserving a nation's life. Near the point of convergence of the two great business streets of our city stands a noble figure of the great Mayor of Providence, who by the potency of his resolute spirit lifted his native town out of the deep ruts of provincial inertness and raised it into line with the progressive cities of the country. While some of his fellow-citizens differed with him in matters of public policy, yet his great zeal and earnestness, his public spirit and courage, his untiring energy and determination of purpose to advance the city's interests on the lines of progress, challenged their respect as well as admiration.

This statue, which you, sir, have generously conferred upon the city, is rare in historic interest. It represents the closing period of the transition state from colonial to national life, from a town organization to that of municipal government.

Standing upon the heights of a fully completed century, Ebenezer Knight Dexter had witnessed the closing scenes and events of a period in American history glorified both by the birth of a nation and the initiation of a new civilization. Standing also upon the threshold of the present century, he saw it launched upon its mighty career. No whisper fell upon his ear, or revealed to his thought the marvellous things which, responsive to the advancing intelligence and self-reliant spirit of the age, the mysterious future was destined to unfold.

The great struggle for independence revealed to him the necessity of a citizen soldiery to protect the institutions of his country, and acting upon that idea, he devised to his native town this magnificent field whereon you have erected his statue to be held in perpetuity and to be used exclusively as a training ground for schooling the citizens of Providence in the duties and discipline of the soldier. From the magnitude of his charitable devises he doubtless foresaw a growing community and a consequent increasing condition of suffering and distress among the unfortunate poor, which strongly appealed to his sympathetic nature.

Thus, while this statue serves to commemorate a valued historic period, pregnant with mighty consequences to the future of unborn millions, it also does honor to the memory of a public benefactor.

To you alone, sir, is due all the honor of having perpetuated in enduring bronze the form and features of this humane and public-spirited citizen of a past generation.

It is a generous action and worthy to be repeated by others of our wealthy and generous fellow-citizens.

And now, sir, in behalf of the city of Providence, whose accredited representative I have the honor on this occasion to be, and with a lively appreciation of the distinguished privilege, I accept this splendid gift.

I speak for all the people of our great city who will hereafter be invested with the possession and also be in the enjoyment of this unique adornment, in asking you to accept their grateful thanks, as well as my own.

I assure you that it will be religiously cherished and protected by the strong arm of the city government; that it will be suitably maintained and handed down from generation to generation, not only in appreciation of your generosity, but as a fitting tribute of respect to the memory of a worthy citizen of the ancient town of Providence, and also as a deserved acknowledgment of the noble charity of which he was the author.

“ In Faith and Hope the world will disagree,
But all mankind’s concern is Charity;
All must be false that thwart this one great end
And all of God that bless mankind, or mend.”

The following Dedication Ode, written for the occasion by Miss Sarah C. Padelford, with music by Emory P. Russell, was then rendered by the school children, viz.:

DEDICATION ODE.

Words by Sarah C. Padelford. Music by Emory P. Russell.

This fair June day we gather here
To sing in chorus loud and clear,
Yielding to him our praise,
Who gave unto the people's needs ;
In mem'ry of whose kindly deeds
This statue now we raise.

The weak and needy know the name
Engraven here for lasting fame,
For still, at his behest,
To shelter are the homeless led,
The naked clothed, the hungry fed,
The weary given rest.

When war's alarum's smote the air,
And discord rent our country fair,
This was a tented field.
Rhode Island's sons were marshalled here,
When forth they marched 'mid shout and cheer
To die—but never yield !

Under the flag of Peace to-day,
We sing in chorus, glad and gay,
In praise of gen'rous deeds.
Who giveth of his means, is blest,
But he who renders self, gives best
Unto his neighbors' needs.

Hon. Thomas Durfee, Ex-Chief Justice of Rhode Island, was then introduced by Chairman Fuller, and his address was as follows :

ORATION BY HON. THOMAS DURFEE.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Ebenezer Knight Dexter created for himself, in the will that he left, a monument more imperishable than bronze. That he did so, however, does not make a statue to his memory the less appropriate. His testamentary benefactions were, in intent, dedicated not to himself, but to the town which he loved and to the poor whom he pitied; and they are the beneficent expressions of his love and his pity. It is only incidentally that he is commemorated by them. The statue is dedicated to him for the city, and it declares to the world the city's gratitude to him for his benefactions and the city's admiration of him for his virtues. It identifies and accentuates the sentiment which it expresses in the form of the expression. I congratulate the donor on the happy thought that inspired him to have it modelled and cast, and to offer it for erection on a site so altogether fitting for it. I trust I may be pardoned if I further say, what so naturally occurs to me to say, that he has set an example worthy of imitation, even should his imitator or imitators have to go far back to the days of Canonicus and Miantonomi for another such subject.

It is customary, when a memorial statue is dedicated, for the orator to give some sketch of the life and character of the person commemorated. The custom is so eminently appropriate that I do not venture to depart from it, though the extreme paucity of materials for such a sketch tempts me to do so.

Ebenezer Knight Dexter was born April 26, 1773, and died August 10, 1824. His whole life was spent in Providence. He was a descendant in the sixth generation of Gregory Dexter,* the “dear and faithful friend” of Roger Williams. Gregory was born at Olney, Northampton county, England, in 1610, and died in Providence, in 1700. Early in his life he left Olney for London, where he engaged in business as printer and stationer. In 1643, when Roger Williams was in London for the procurement of the first charter, his “Key into the Language of America” came out there under the imprint of Gregory Dexter. The old Providence records, however, seem to show that the latter had taken up his residence in Providence several years earlier; but whenever he came, his education and ability quickly gave him prominence. He frequently represented the town as commissioner under the first charter; he was one of the grantees of the second charter and a deputy or representative under it. He was Town Clerk for several years, and he filled divers other stations of dignity and trust, and was, for a time, pastor of the First Baptist Church. The infant town was, unhappily, full of contentiousness; he brought to it a spirit of moderation and forbearance. He lived ninety years, and, dying, left his name unblemished. We see him rather vaguely by the flickering light of old records and notices; but, so well as I can make him out, he was a man of noble nature, open-minded to the truth, and scrupulous—sometimes overmuch, yet sweet-tempered and

* As follows: Gregory, born 1610; Stephen, 1647; John, 1670; Stephen, 1703; Knight, 1734; Ebenezer Knight, 1773.

conciliatory, a lover of his kind, religious, and indefatigable in well-doing, and he seems to have transmitted, along with his blood, a goodly portion of his virtues to his descendants.

The father of Ebenezer Knight Dexter has left on record evidence of his regard for education,* and we may, therefore presume that the son received as good an education as the local schools then existing could afford. We may also presume that when he left school it was to enter, so soon as prepared, upon his business career ; for, as Judge Staples says in his Annals of Providence, "he was educated a merchant, and pursued his business with such strict attention and industry that he was able to retire with a fortune when most men begin to think of accumulating one." His success, however, was probably due not wholly to his industry, but partly also to his having had the good fortune to embark in business on that rising tide of prosperous trade and commerce which followed the adoption of the Federal Constitution. He was appointed in 1810 United States Marshal for the District of Rhode Island.† "He held the office," says Judge Staples—and no better authority can be asked—"in most inauspicious times for himself. During the embargo, non-intercourse and war, his duties were arduous and sometimes directly contravening the wishes and

* He was one of seventeen who "from regard to the instruction of youth in the most necessary parts of learning," had, prior to 1770, joined with the town of Providence in erecting a commodious brick schoolhouse, two stories high, therein.—*R. I. Colonial Records*, vol. vii., p. 6.

† His official bond was filed in the District Court for the Rhode Island District, May 7, 1810.

interests of a large portion of the community; yet he so carefully and skillfully managed that he lost not the esteem and respect of his fellow townsmen nor the confidence of the government." Indeed, his continuance in the office for more than fourteen years, until death removed him, is plenary proof that he was satisfactory alike to the government and the community. As marshal he superintended the taking of the United States censuses of 1810 and 1820.

In 1819 he suffered a heavy affliction in the death of his wife, an excellent and accomplished lady, a daughter of the Honorable David Howell, then District Judge for the Rhode Island District. She had borne to her husband only one child, who lived but a few months.* Five years after her death he himself died, still a widower. The day after his death the Providence *Gazette* announced it as follows :

"Died yesterday morning, after a protracted illness which he bore with manly fortitude, Ebenezer Knight Dexter, in the 53d year of his age. In all the relations of his life he was a man of exemplary morals. As a son, a brother and a husband, dutiful, affectionate and liberal; prompt and conscientious in the discharge of his official duties, scrupulous and just in his dealings, and attached by principle to the institutions and liberties of his country, his death is a subject of regret to a numerous circle of

*The monument erected by the City of Providence, in the North Burying Ground, in commemoration of Mr. Dexter and his benefactions, has on its westerly face the following inscription, to wit:—"Waitstill Dexter, wife of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, born June 27, 1776. Died June 15, 1819;" and under it the following, to wit:—"Their only child, Mary Dexter, died March 10, 1801, aged 5 months and 10 days."

relatives and friends, to his neighbors and fellow citizens and to the public institutions of which he was an active and efficient member. Funeral this afternoon from his Mansion house on Benefit street, where his relatives and friends are requested to attend."

I have given the notice entire because it is the completest portrayal of him that I have discovered, and probably the completest that exists. It is the picture of a singularly noble and attractive character, replete with manly and manifold life and activity, yet gentle and tender. It was evidently drawn by a friendly hand, but carefully, after vivid impressions received from life, and doubtless it presents him as he appeared in his habitual walk and conversation.

When the contents of Mr. Dexter's will, executed some two and a half months before his death, became known, they exhibited him in a new, and, in some respects, nobler aspect, as a munificent public benefactor. The will gave to the town the spacious plain around us for perpetual use as a training field ; the forty acres of land where the Dexter Asylum now is, for the use and accommodation of the poor of the town ; and finally, subject to some comparatively small legacies, and to the charge of a few annuities, all the residue of his estate, real and personal, to be kept, with power to convert it into other forms of investment, as a permanent fund forever for the benefit of the poor of the town. The town, at a meeting specially held, accepted the gift in resolutions of grateful appreciation and eulogy of the giver, voting that it be denominated "The Dexter Donation." The town also adopted suit-

able provisions for its care and management, which have since been duly observed. The worth of the property to the town, when given, was estimated at \$60,000, and it has since increased to very many times as much. The donation was certainly, for the time, a most extraordinary benefaction. Since then seventy years have brought their changes, with a growth of riches then undreamed of, and yet no second benefactor of the town or city has appeared to challenge Mr. Dexter's preëminence.

It is natural for us, when we contemplate an act of such far-reaching beneficence, to wish to know how the doer of the act was led to do it. The wish is as proper as natural; for any knowledge is valuable which throws light on the springs of character and conduct, or on the processes of human progress. In Mr. Dexter's case it is readily seen that the death of his child and wife largely released him, in making his will, from the obligations of family and kinship. But such opportunities for charitable devise frequently occur without being improved. There is need of other motives; and, hence, and the more especially since good deeds are bettered by good motives, it is a pleasure to learn from Mr. Dexter himself the motives which influenced him. He has declared them in his will. They were, he says, "a strong attachment to my native town and an ardent desire to ameliorate the condition of the poor and contribute to their comfort and relief." *Public spirit and benevolence*, two of the purest and loftiest of human motives! Every expression which I have seen, coming from his contemporaries, is confirmatory of the sincerity of his declaration.

It would be instructive to trace in detail the manner in which these motives were developed; but, with the little that we know of him, this is impossible. The contemporary history of his town, however, and of the times in which he lived, suggests probabilities which may properly detain us a moment. He was born a year after the burning of the Gaspee, three years before the declaration of independence, and he was nine years old when the war came to an end and peace was proclaimed. He was thus the child of an heroic age, when public spirit, perfusing the air, was the life-breath of noble souls. His father, before the war, had been colonel of the Providence County Militia, and naturally his house would be visited by soldiers and patriots, and the son would often hear the vicissitudes of the war discussed, now with hope, now with anxiety, always with public-spirited devotion. So too he must often have listened to the romantic stories of the privateers that frequented the harbor, and that, from time to time, eluding the British cruisers in the bay, scoured the ocean for prizes, which taken reinforced alike the resources and the confidence of the citizens. And, finally, when peace returned and independence was assured, he doubtless watched with others the procession of the people, as, with banners and music, it marched through the streets, to the accompaniment of bells and cannon and the gratulatory cheers of enthusiastic spectators, in celebration of that great event. True, he was but a child, too young to comprehend the full significance of what he saw and heard, but he was not too young to share the emotions and catch the spirit of his elders; for what

child who has outgrown his cradle, is too young for that? And after the war was past, the memories of the war remained, to be repeated over and over in his hearing, with pardonable preference always for whatever told most for the gallantry and the glory of the town. And so for long his childish predilections would be fostered and invigorated.

Later there was the growing commerce of the town. We are told, on the authority of a letter addressed to Congress, in 1790, by a corporation created to keep the channel of the river open, that the number of vessels then belonging to this port exceeded the number then belonging to New York. What a stimulus it must have been to his young civic pride and interest to see them beating up the river, or riding at anchor in the harbor, or lying at the wharves discharging the merchandise of many countries and climes, or receiving their outward freights; some of them swarming with sailors of outlandish speech and picturesque attire. In 1787 the ship General Washington, Captain Jonathan Denison, made the first voyage from this port, and one of the first from any American port, to Canton. I think it is not unreasonable to suppose that Ebenezer Knight Dexter was one of the spectators who watched her, dropping down the river and disappearing on her long and lonely course across the Atlantic and over unfamiliar seas, and that when, after more than nineteen months, she returned, he was among the visitors who boarded her and listened to her sun-browned mariners telling of the immemorial wonders of the Orient. Oh no! the ancient town did not fail of

incidents to feed the fancy and nourish the affections of its children.

In the first decade after the war the principal matters of public concern were the contest over paper money and the contest in regard to the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and in both the town was on the winning and wiser side. Its wisdom, however, doubtless became more patent to Mr. Dexter after he was in business and had profited by it, and surely, while he was sharing the town's prosperity he would not let his liking for it abate. His seems to have been a social and sensitive nature, quick to respond to all genial and elevating influences, and prompt to recognize the obligations of gratitude, however incurred; and when in his long last illness, childless and wifeless, he reviewed his past and remembered his many pleasant associations with the town, and more vividly realized how closely his fortunes and its fortunes had been identified, and how much his life, engrafted into the larger life of the community, had been augmented and improved thereby—his public spirit, asserting itself, naturally moved him to his crowning act, the final expression of his civic affection, the munificent testamentary donation which brings us together here today to do him honor.

There is also much in the circumstances of his life to show how his kindly feeling for the poor and his ardent desire to ameliorate their condition may have been developed. The town where he lived was scarcely more than a village. Its population at the close of the war was 4,310; in 1810 it was only 7,614, and in 1820, four years before his death, it did not exceed 12,000. In such small places

rich and poor live more closely intermingled than in larger ones, and their respective characters and fortunes are better known to one another. Now when the Revolutionary War broke out its effect in Providence was to interrupt the course of business and curtail the means of livelihood, adding to the ranks of the poor and the indigent. And when, after the war, business revived, the poor did not all profit by the revival; for, meanwhile, many had become superannuated, or broken in health and spirit, and had to give way to younger or stronger men. It was a time when the duty of making adequate provision for the poor was faintly felt, and when the neglect and cruel treatment, too generally prevalent in alms-houses, seldom provoked condemnation commensurate with the wrong, so that the prospect of pauperism was so abhorrent that many suffered the extremes of destitution rather than yield to it. This wretched plight of the poor could not but have been known to others as well as to Mr. Dexter; but while they passed it lightly by, he took it feelingly to heart, and, in his later years, ardently desired to ameliorate it; and hence the beneficent charities of his will.

Under the will many parcels of real estate came to the city. Two of these have a special interest, because while the others were permitted to be sold and the proceeds funded, they were required to be kept undisposed of; so that, if the city be true to its trust, they will remain the everlasting mementoes, conspicuous to all generations, of the public spirit or of the public spirit and benevolence of the testator. One of them is the open tract around us. It was devised for use as a training

field and for "no other use or purpose whatsoever;" express direction, illustrative of the gentle-heartedness of the giver, being superadded, that no public execution of criminals should ever be permitted to take place upon it. Latterly its use as a training field has much diminished, and its flat, vacant surfaces, unenlivened by the pageantry of military parade, have lost a portion of their ancient attractiveness. Let us hope that the statue today unveiled, so estimable in art and interesting in portraiture, may restore it to favor and lead to improvements which, consistently with the trust, will make it permanently popular.

The other parcel, so inalienably devised, is what the testator called his "Neck Farm," now the Dexter Asylum grounds, across the river on the city's eastern slope, fronting the sunrise. I trust there are among my hearers some who, in these enchanting summer days, occasionally drive or ramble through that delightful neighborhood. If such a one, when he reaches the Asylum grounds, will enter, instead of passing them, and, standing on the gentle acclivity where long ago Mr. Dexter doubtless often stood and watched his cattle cropping the quiet pastures below, will let his eyes wander, and loiter as they wander, over the ample spaces covered from boundary to boundary with varied and richest tilth; then, looking beyond the walls, remark how the city in its growth is girdling them round with handsome houses, and then, still further gazing, delight his vision with the wide extent and variety of the remoter prospects, he cannot but find himself surprised with a sudden grow-

ing sense of the material value and beauty of the place. But he should remember, too, that besides the Asylum grounds, there are properties supplementary to them, now annually yielding an income of over sixteen thousand dollars ; and if, remembering this, he will also remember that the poor of the city have enjoyed this double bounty of the will for nearly seventy years, and that, by the letter of the will, they will continue to enjoy it forever—then the benefaction will present itself to him anew in still loftier aspects, in the light of which the more material aspect, which had so captivated his regard, will seem to dwindle and disappear ;—for who can compute the benefits to the poor—physical, moral, spiritual—which have already accrued from it, or even begin to conceive those which are to follow in the endless march of the ages yet to come ?

I am aware that there is another view which, in the rapid growth of the city, is coming more and more to the front ; but to-day I prefer to view the gift as the donor and his contemporaries viewed it ; and, when I read the grateful acknowledgments with which his contemporaries committed the town to the trusts, I feel quite sure that nobody then had put on the disenchanting spectacles of the statistician or the tax assessor.

Ebenezer Knight Dexter is a conspicuous example of the public-spirited citizen who exercises his public spirit for the behoof of his own town. The example suggests to me some remarks, in closing my address, upon the high uses and effects of such a spirit so exercised. Of course

public spirit, however exercised, if worthily, is praiseworthy. There are times when, as a matter of duty, town or city must be postponed to the State, and there are also times when State, town and city must all be postponed to the nation, and when the public-spirited citizen, looking beyond State and town or city, must stand ready to pour out his means and his heart's blood also, for the salvation of the nation, or for the promotion of its welfare. Such a time was our late Civil War. But, ordinarily, for the private citizen, his nearest duty is to the town or city where he lives, has his home, rears his family and consorts with his fellow citizens in the common concerns of daily life. The citizen who addicts himself to a cosmopolitan, instead of a civic, public spirit, too often lets his philanthropy run to waste while he potters with Utopian day-dreams or hollow abstractions yielding no fruit. The reason is obvious. The citizen who aspires to do any clear, tangible good, cannot do it in the abstract or general, but must do it, if at all, in the concrete and particular; and he finds a thousand opportunities for so doing it in the town or city where he lives for one that he finds in the broad world outside of it.

Let us pass to another point of view. Cities, especially the larger and more metropolitan, have played a great part in civilization. Such cities are centres of life and light, naturally developing or attracting genius, learning, ambition and leadership. It is to

“Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
And eloquence,”

more than to the whole Greek peninsula besides, that we owe that finer Hellenism, prized so highly by scholars as the very capstone of a completed culture. It was Rome that originated the mighty movements which resulted in the conquest and pacification of the ancient world, fitting it for the easier dissemination of the Christian faith. And it was Venice which, insulated amid the marshes of the Adriatic, while the Roman Empire was falling into ruins, organized herself as a republic, and, espousing the sea, reached out after the commerce and the arts of the Mediterranean and the Orient, and, grasping them, acquired the incalculable riches thence accruing; and which, crowned with architectural beauty, commands, even in her decay, the admiration of travellers from all lands. These are cities of preëminent renown in history, and more such might be mentioned. I pass on to cities less famous, but not less serviceable to mankind. In Mediæval Europe, when liberty, gasping under the oppressions of feudalism, was ready to expire, it was the cities, widely scattered, which gave it refuge and, invincibly warding their civic franchises, preserved it, and with it, the rudiments of self-government, for more auspicious ages. And, coming to our own land, it was in town meetings and in spontaneous town assemblages, rather than in colonial legislatures, that, in ante-revolutionary days, the principles of the revolution were discussed and the minds of our fore-fathers convinced and fortified for the desperate struggle which gave us our national independence.

But why do I cite these trite and tedious instances? Because they are instances of cities and towns made

what they were by the public spirit of their citizens. Some of them may have been favored by circumstances ; but it is not the circumstances, but the citizens of a city that make for it historic importance and renown. They all started from small beginnings, and some of them, planted amid hostile circumstances, were moulded into greatness by constant conflict with them. The citizens were compelled, generation after generation, to unite for the common good, until necessity bred in them a habit of public spirit, which, grafted on their natures, became a heritable potency of the race. The Roman citizen of the more heroic period felt Rome pulsating in his blood and bracing every fibre of his being. I cite the instances, too, because they show that the exercise of public spirit by the citizen for his city, does not stop with the city, but often reaches in influence and effect indefinitely beyond it. Let us not delude ourselves with the idea that this is not as true to-day as it was of old. Who shall presume to cast the horoscope of a good purpose worthily fulfilled ? Who can tell us how widely it will diffuse, or how long it will perpetuate itself ? If the citizens of Providence could put her in the forefront of American cities, for whatever is best in civic development, what better could they hope to do, if it were only for the light which would shine from her for others ? But such a city could give leading as well as light, and surely the times are coming which will cry aloud for both.

Mr. Dexter showed his public spirit by giving directly to his town. Others who have land or money to give, may prefer to give it through one or more of the chari-

table or educational institutions of the city ; and so given, it will often more effectually accomplish the giver's purpose than if given to the city itself, and will be equally expressive of his public spirit. And of course there are other ways besides giving by which the citizen can show his public spirit. He may show it in business, if he will keep an eye open to the public good ; as when, for instance, he introduces or largely develops and improves a valuable industry of superior grade, and aims, therein, at high excellence and beauty of workmanship, as well as at his own profit. The city as well as the citizen takes a step forward when this is done. The establishment which cast our statue, and which I may therefore mention to-day, is a capital illustration. The creation or extension of such a business brings to the city an increase of excellent citizens, which is a great benefit ; and also gives her a larger business outlook and a wide repute for beautiful achievement in the industrial arts, which is both benefit and prestige. Citizens who thus serve their city are as much its benefactors as the givers of land or money, and as much entitled to their proper meed of praise and gratitude. Such benefits are not the less real because collateral rather than immediate ; but, on the contrary, as factors in the city's growth and improvement, they are vastly more real and important. And so the citizen may show his public spirit even when he builds a house for himself, if, looking beyond mere physical or personal needs, he will make it a handsome instead of a common or ugly structure. How much more delightful as a place of residence, how much more val-

able as property, the city of Providence would be if its houses had always been so built! And how small the additional outlay in comparison with the resulting benefit! These are but illustrative suggestions. When the right spirit generally prevails and the right motives influence, such chances to promote the city's welfare will continually suggest themselves.

My subject has range enough to warrant my saying a few words on city politics. Every city has or ought to have its own politics, determined by its own needs, interests and opportunities ; and there is no good reason why the selection of city officers should not be determined in the same manner, regardless of party. But, so long as party makes the nominations, the voter, when there is little or nothing else to determine his choice, will instinctively vote for the candidate of his own party. He cannot be blamed for it ; it is human nature ; and all of us, if we are not cranks, like to humor our human nature when we can without harm. But suppose the right candidate is put up by the wrong party, what then shall the voter do ? Undoubtedly vote for the right candidate, and so, while doing his duty by the city, teach his party to put up right candidates of its own ; or, if it run short, borrow from its opponents. There is no way in which the voters as voters can more effectually show their public spirit and serve the city. Such a practice would tend not only to make the parties more careful to nominate their best men, but also to make their best men more willing to be nominated ; since, under such a practice, an election would be indeed an honor, tantamount to a patent

of civic nobility. There are city offices, too, in which excellent service ought to ensure continuance of tenure, so that the city may benefit by the experience as well as by the fidelity of the incumbent.

Sometimes, however, as I have intimated, the difficulty is not to get the right nomination made, but to get the right nominee to accept. No man can presume to decide for another in such case; but surely it is no presumption to say that, if the office seek the man because he has peculiar fitness for it, the man will show a true public spirit by consenting to accept it; and that in any event, if just to himself, he will not refuse without first seriously considering whether it will not show a culpable lack of public spirit for him to do so. I suppose there are citizens who would be more than glad to run for Congress, and glad to run for the General Assembly, who, if the office of alderman or common councilman were proposed to them, would turn from it with distaste, as a place of much drudgery and little distinction. Yet, if such a citizen would calmly reflect, he might find another side coming into view, raising the question whether, after all, the city office would not be for him the office of the greater public usefulness, and therefore the more honorable for his acceptance. Many a man has gone to Congress to be so completely lost in his party, that he could individually reappear only to be counted at the roll-call, or to make a speech that nobody listened to when it was delivered, and very few read after it had been printed, who, as alderman or councilman, could easily have found the place where he would have done great service for the

city, and have gained a host of friends to appreciate and honor his worth and work.

To the man of large views and commensurate ability the sphere of civic service offers peculiar opportunities, beyond the purview of party tyranny, for making his personality felt and his genius effective. Josiah Quincy, the second Mayor of Boston, lived to be ninety-two years old. Previous to his mayoralty, he had served his State eight years as representative in Congress, and acquired celebrity as a consummate orator and statesman; after his mayoralty, he was nineteen years President of Harvard University and rendered extraordinary services to that ancient seat of learning; and yet we are told by one who well knew his history, that "in the six years that he served the city he did the work which gave him his highest fame, and, in the retrospect of a long and varied career, the most satisfaction." But we need not seek abroad for examples. At the western junction of Weybosset and Westminster streets stands the statue of a Mayor who spent his best years in the service of the city, constantly initiating new measures of progress and improvement, often bitterly opposed, but never unappreciated, and finally commemorated by his fellow citizens with gratitude and honor. These were both public-spirited civic servants. We may be incapable of matching their services; but at a time like this when, in a neighboring city, the air reeks with shameful revelations of official malversation and infidelity, we should at least emulate the spirit that inspired them. There is a way in which, if our hearts be set to make our city excellent among cities, we can all

help to do it ; and that is, by trying to make ourselves excellent among citizens ; for a city is worthy as its citizens are worthy, noble as they are noble, great as they are great ; and it cannot become, or for long remain, either worthy, or noble, or great, in the better meaning of “great,” in any other manner. I utter familiar truths, but the occasion gives them emphasis.

My address draws to its close. A moment more and we leave the statue here, a silent preacher on its solitary pedestal. Here let it remain, while generation follows generation and the city grows and thickens around it ; and here, so long as it remains, let it continually preach, with unobtrusive iteration, its wordless but impressive sermon on the high value of public service, or of public service and benevolence, exercised by the citizens for the city’s welfare.

At the conclusion of Judge Durfee’s oration the audience joined in singing “America,” and the services concluded with the benediction, pronounced by Rev. Edward Holyoke.

REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE GIFT OF HENRY C.
CLARK, ESQ., TO THE CITY.

TO THE HONORABLE THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY
OF PROVIDENCE :

The joint special committee appointed by resolution No. 401, series of 1893, and authorized by resolution No. 384, series of 1894, to arrange for the dedication of the statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, presented to the city by Henry C. Clark, Esq., respectfully report :

That they have fully discharged the duty assigned them, that the beautiful statue given to the city was dedicated with appropriate exercises on Dexter Training Field, on June 29th, and that the unveiling and dedication was attended by a representative gathering of our citizens, by the State and city officials, and by a large number of the children of the public schools.

In recognition of this munificent gift to the city your committee submit the accompanying resolutions, tendering the thanks of the City Council to the donor of said statue, and also to print the report of the dedicatory exercises, and unanimously recommend the passage of the same.

Respectfully submitted, for the committee,

MYRON H. FULLER, *Chairman.*

JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

No. 637.

[Approved December 4th, 1894.]

WHEREAS, Henry C. Clark, Esq., on June 29th, 1894, formally presented to the city of Providence a magnificent bronze statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, the city's noblest benefactor and friend of the poor and homeless; and

WHEREAS, The citizens of this city recognize the patriotic spirit that prompted this generous gift for the ornamentation of the Dexter Training Field and for the perpetuation of the memory of an illustrious philanthropist; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the City Council hereby tenders to Henry C. Clark, Esq., on behalf of the citizens of Providence, this expression of its grateful appreciation of his patriotism and generosity in endowing his native city with so munificent a gift, and that the thanks of the City Council be hereby offered to Mr. Clark for the artistic statue of Ebenezer Knight Dexter that he has erected on the Dexter Training Field.

RESOLVED, That the City Clerk be and he is hereby directed to have a copy of this testimonial suitably engrossed and presented to Mr. Clark, the expense thereof to be charged to the appropriation for contingencies.



